

BE SUBJECT UNTO THE HIGHER POWERS

If you've been following—or trying to follow—all that has been going on in Minneapolis over the last few weeks, your head is undoubtedly spinning. News comes out...statements are made...and then come the pictures and videos. After that, come the questions—lots of them. Questions like:

- Was Renee Good really trying to run over the I.C.E. officer?
- Why did Alex Pretti bring a handgun with two full magazines to a “peaceful” protest?
- Are the procedures being used by the I.C.E. officers even legal?
- Is it okay for protesters to disrupt a church service?
- Are the protesters being paid and if so, by whom?
- Is some of this protesting a distraction to keep attention away from the fraud investigation?
- And let's not forget how difficult it is to be at the **receiving end** of these protests. How “on edge” would **you be** if people screamed expletives at you all day...and threw things at you...and said you deserved to die?
- How well **would you function** if people made noise outside of your hotel all night long and you hardly slept?

I could go on and on with the questions—and I have no doubt that many of you could do the same! But the question I want **us to consider** isn't on this list—**but should be** if you are a child of God! The **question is** this: Does God's Word have anything to say about what is going on in Minneapolis?

Why is that an important question? Because even though Minneapolis is 200 miles away, most of you still have an opinion about what is going on! Assuming I'm correct, **how** did you formulate that opinion? Is it **emotion and feeling** driven—or is it based on the **Word of God**?

Last week I shared with you my surprise that over half the women who had abortions—55% in 2024—were **mothers already**. As I thought a little more on **why** that was the case, the reason I kept coming back to was this: they made an **emotional** decision—based on circumstances—instead of **God-pleasing decision** based on God's Word!

God's people need to develop the habit of letting **God's Word** be the driving force in their **decision-making**—and **opinion-forming**—not their **emotions**! We are to bring **every thought** captive to the obedience **of Christ**—not captive to the obedience of **our feelings**!

And so this morning, we are going to look at what God says about this issue. Trying to answer all the questions I mentioned earlier can make the situation quite confusing. Looking at the Word of God clears it all up, though! And—believe it or not—God's Word even tells us what “side” to be on! You may not like it, but that's between you and the Lord! My responsibility is to tell you **what God's Word says**. It is up to you whether you are going to **agree with** it and **obey it**!

Please take your Bibles and turn to Romans 13, then follow along as I read verses 1-7 so we have the context. You probably already noticed that the title of the message comes from the first part of verse 1: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.”

First, I want to consider... **1. The context**

Even though we read through the verses just a moment ago, I want to explain some of the words being used.

--Critical to understanding this passage is understanding the word “**power**” and “**powers**”

--It is used 3 times in verse 1—and once in verses 2 and 3.

Our **English word** “power” is translated primarily from two Greek words—*dunamis* and *exousia*.

--*Dunamis* carries the idea of strength and might

--*Exousia* carries the idea of authority; the right to exercise power over others

Not surprisingly, *exousia* is the Greek word used here in this passage so when we see “power” or “powers,” we need to think “those in authority.” In other words, **the government**!

The second word we need to look at is the word “rulers.” Who are the rulers? The higher powers—the authority—that is over us! Paul refers to those in authority over us as “powers” in verses 1 and 2, “rulers” in verse 3, and “ministers” in verses 4 and 6. They are all being used interchangeably.

Next, let’s consider... **2. The command to obey the government**

--Vs 1 “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.” The verb translated “let be subject to”—be in subjection and submission to—is in the **imperative**, meaning it is a command.

--**Who** does God command to obey? **Every** soul—**every person**—with no exceptions!

--**Who** do we obey? The “higher powers.” “Higher powers” is not a reference **to God** like some people use the phrase. And we know they are not **spiritual beings** in the angelic world because they “bear the sword” it says in verse 4—meaning they **physically punish** those that do evil! So “higher powers” refers to **those who are in authority** over us—in this context, the government!

--**When** do we obey? The verb “be subject to” is not only a command—it is in the **present** tense. That means it is something we should be **continually** doing—**always** doing—not just when **we like** the laws that they make.

--And then God through Paul gives us three reasons **why** we should obey.

Reason #1. Because.... **A. God is the Ultimate Authority** (vs 1b)

We see that in the middle of verse 1 “For there is no power **but of God...**” Stated another way, “There is no authority except from God” (NASB).

God is the **ultimate authority**—and the Bible is abundantly clear regarding that!

Isaiah 43:13 “Yea, before the day was I am He; and there is **none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let [stop] it?**”

Daniel 4:32 “...until thou know that the **most High ruleth** in the kingdom of men, and **giveth it to whomsoever** He will.”

Daniel 4:35 “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and **He doeth according to His will** in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and **none can stay [stop] His hand**, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

I Timothy 6:15 “Which in His times He shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, **the King of kings, and Lord of lords;**” (See also Gen 18:25; Psalm 2:1-4; Ps 115:3; Daniel 4:17; I Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 12:23)

Since God is the ultimate authority, we obviously need to **be subject to Him**. In other words, we need to **obey Him and what He says!**

But what does that have to do with government? Everything! Why?

Because... **B. Human government derives its authority from God**

We see that in the end of verse 1: “...the powers that be are ordained of God.” The Greek word “ordain” carries the idea of “appointing, designating, and establishing.” The last phrase, then, could be translated: “The authorities that exist have been established by God” (NIV) or “...those that exist have been appointed by God.” (Berean Standard Bible)

Simply put, **God has appointed government** over us! The government has authority over us because **God gave them authority** over us! How do we know this passage refers to government? We already touched on it some—they “bear the sword”—but we also know from verse 6 because we are to pay “tribute and custom” to them—meaning taxes!

Why are we to be subject to—to submit to—the government? Because God as the ultimate authority commands it—and because God has appointed the government over us! We have a **third** reason found in the beginning of verse 2.

Because... **C. Resisting the authority God has ordained is resisting God** (vs 2a)

Does the Bible really say that if we resist the government, we are resisting God? Notice again what it says in vs 2: “Whoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” In other words, if you resist God’s delegated authority—government—you are resisting who God has appointed over you.

And if you are **resisting who God appointed** over you, how are you not **resisting God**?

So disobedience **to the government** is disobedience **to God**!

I am by no means a mind-reader, but I'm fairly certain that there are a number of you thinking, 'But Pastor, what if the government is corrupt—and the laws are bad?' To which I reply, '**Name one thing** that man touches that **he does not corrupt**!'

On a more serious note, that is an **important** question—and I will come back to it a little later. But it is **equally important** to remind ourselves—**again**, even though we just talked about it—that “**the powers that be are appointed by God.**” John Philipps expands on this truth in his commentary of Romans: “Evil men may be elected to power or may seize power. They may have no thought of God at all, but the very fact that He permits them to seize the reins of government means that **He has a purpose to fulfill** even through their misrule....Governments may be weak or strong, just or oppressive, benevolent or cruel, wise or foolish, but in each case **God has His way and moves His own plans forward**. Democracies and dictatorships alike **are under His control**. God balances one nation off against another. Nations come and go, kingdoms rise and fall, empires wax and wane, **but behind them all is God, overruling in the affairs of men.**” (*Exploring Romans – An Expository Commentary*, John Phillips, page 213, emphasis mine).

The point, of course, is this: **God knows what kind of ruler is in place** because **He puts them there**! And since He puts them there, to resist them is to **resist God**!

Next, let's consider... **3. The consequences for disobeying government**

What are **the consequences** for disobeying government? Notice what it sends in the end of verse 2: “...and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” What does that **mean**?

It obviously **doesn't mean** that people who disobey the government will suffer “damnation” in the sense of eternal punishment! So **what does** it mean? It simply means **judgment or punishment** which, of course, is dependent on the nature of the crime—or at least, should be!

Verse 4 also mentions consequences for those who disobey the laws of the land. Notice what it says at the end of the verse: “...for he is the minister of God, **a revenger to execute wrath** upon him that doeth evil.”

So if you do evil—if you break the law—you should expect to be punished! Unless, of course, you live in California. You can steal all you want—as long as you keep the value of what you steal under \$1000!

4. The commitment to obey government

Why should God's people—according to God's Word—commit to obeying the laws of the government that God has put in place? **Two** reasons.

A. Because of the purpose of government

What is the purpose of government? To **serve God**! Where does it say that? I already mentioned in passing that the word “**minister**”—which comes from the Greek word *diakonos*—is a word that means servant.

--Notice the beginning of vs 4 “For he is the **minister** of God...” Who is the “he”? The “rulers” of verse 3; in other words, government!

--We see it again in the **middle** of vs 4 “for he is the minister of God...”

--In verse 6, we have the word “minister” again—although in this case it is from a different Greek word.

The government, then, is put in place by God—to serve God! **How?** By...

1) Protecting and promoting good

--First part of vs 3: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.” The government **promotes** good by not punishing those who are **doing good**.

--Last part of v 3: “do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.” Does the government **praise us** for doing good? I don't know that the *government* praises its citizens, but there are outstanding citizen awards, and outstanding teacher awards, and outstanding firefighters and policemen awards. And the military certainly honors (posthumously) those who have lost their lives serving their country.

--Verse 4: "For he is the minister [servant] of God to thee for good." Here we have the idea that it is good to have the protection and services of the government—and hopefully you agree! What if we had no law enforcement to keep our neighborhoods and streets safe? What if we didn't have a military? What if we didn't have fire fighters...or ambulance drivers...or snowplow drivers to keep the roads clear?

Not only is our government to protect and promote good, it is also to be... **2) Punishing evil**

--First part of vs 3 again: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, **but to evil**." Government is a "terror" to evil works because vs 4 tells us the government "beareth not the sword in vain."

Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians from Corinth in approximately 58 AD. Rome was the world power at that time, and Roman officials had a sword strapped to their side. Why? Was it merely a decoration? No; they wore it because they had the authority to punish by death!

--Last part of vs 4: "...for he is the minister of God, **a revenger to execute wrath** upon him that doeth evil."

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord" (Rom 12:19); and yet God has given authority to government to execute wrath—to bring judgment upon—evil doers. As Christians, we ought to be thankful for policemen...and prosecutors...and judges...and prison keepers who all have a part in serving God by **punishing evil** as ordained by God.

To recap, we should want to obey the laws of the land in order to avoid the punishment that comes from breaking them! But there is another reason—a higher reason—found in vs 5 and it is this...

B. Because it preserves a good conscience toward God

Notice what it says: "Wherefore ye must needs be subject"—you need to submit to the laws of the government—"not only for wrath"—**not just to avoid punishment**—"but also for conscience sake." A higher motive than **getting caught** for breaking the law ought to be that we don't **want to displease God!**

Steven Cole gave a rather humorous—and yet pointed—example: "With **outward compliance**, you are honest on your income tax forms because you're afraid that if you aren't, you might get caught. With **inward obedience**, you are honest because you want to have a clear conscience before God, who reads your tax forms before you send them in." (*Lesson 88: The Government and You (Romans 13:1-7)*, Steven J. Cole, Bible.org)

Here's another way to look at it. God ordains government to promote the good—and punish the bad. How can you **fight against** what God has ordained—but still have a **clear conscience** before Him? You can't!

Lastly, let's consider... **5. Conditions when it is okay to disobey**

We are to **obey the laws** of our government—and **not resist the laws** of our government—because **God has appointed the government** over us for the purpose of **promoting the good**—and **punishing the evil**. But what if the government **is evil**?

Some of you might be surprised to learn that at the time Paul wrote this, the government **was evil!** Nero was the emperor of Rome—and an incredibly wicked man. He murdered a number of people—including his own mother—and **kicked** one of his wives to death!

Tradition has it that he himself set Rome on fire to divert attention from the fact that Rome was crumbling under his leadership—and to use Christians as a scapegoat. Nero tortured Christians—I'll spare you the horrific details—and yet, God through Paul says we are to **obey** even the laws that a **wicked ruler makes!**

Is it ever okay to **disobey the government**? **Yes**—when the government asks us to **disobey God!**

--Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow down to the image that King Nebuchadnezzar made—even if disobedience meant getting thrown into a fiery furnace!

--Daniel didn't obey the command to pray to the king—even if disobedience resulted in being thrown into the lion's den.

--And Peter—after being commanded by the government to stop preaching—disobeyed that command! When arrested and brought before the religious rulers, his response was "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

So it is okay to **disobey** the government when following a **government** law means disobeying a law **of God!**

Have we ever been asked to follow a law that went against the laws of God? **Yes, we have**—during COVID! Churches were told **not to meet** due to a state of emergency—but abortion clinics and liquor stores were allowed to remain open! This fall, the voters in Wisconsin will have the opportunity to vote “Yes” for a constitutional amendment that will **prohibit the government from stopping public worship services**—even during a state of emergency!

What I want to do now is consider what is going on in Minnesota and look at it through a Biblical lens to see which “side” God wants us to be on. Stated another way, “Is it God’s will for His people to protest against ICE?” And the answer is a resounding, “NO!” And here’s why:

--There is a **right, legal** way—to enter our country—and a **wrong, illegal** way. **Each country determines** its own immigration laws and what is the **right** way—and **wrong** way—to enter a particular country.

--The **Bible does not specifically address** the issue of immigration so we cannot say a **command of God** has been broken when it comes to an open or closed border.

--But the Bible does say that government is to **promote good**—and punish evil.

--Is free government assistance—whether it be food, health care, housing, or money—to people who **entered illegally**—rewarding “good”—or rewarding “evil?” It is rewarding **evil**—the **opposite** of what government is supposed to do!

--Is **deporting people** who entered the country illegally **rewarding** them for breaking the law—or **punishing** them? It is punishing the wrong-doers—which is exactly what God appointed them to do!

--So if you are **protesting** the government’s mandate—from God—to **punish the wrong-doers**, you are in essence wanting them **to disobey what God** ordained government to do!

Are **you obeying God** when you **are stopping others** from obeying God? Obviously not! So you cannot be a **God-obeying** Christian and **physically interfere** with I.C.E. in an effort to prevent them from doing what **God ordained them to do!**

--Do you have to agree with **how** things are being done? No; I’m not saying that!

--Should you **be saddened** that two people lost their lives? Yes; we should be!

But that doesn’t mean **God’s will has changed** and that we now have the right to interfere with what I.C.E. is trying to do! **As believers**, we should **support them**...and **pray for them**...and **pray** for those that “**give the orders**.”

Many people are **calling for unity**, but their idea of unity is “ICE OUT.” The only way **true unity** can be obtained is if there is one **objective, non-changing standard** to go by. We have one—it’s called **the Word of God!**

And, sadly, that is not the standard most people want to live by. **But what about you?** What do **you** base **your decisions** on? How **do you** formulate **your opinions**? Are **you** driven by emotions and public opinion—or do you look at things **through the lens of the Word of God?**

Before we sing our closing hymn, here are a few things I believe God would have us consider.

1. First, maybe you are not in the habit of looking at issues through the lens of Scripture. How do we develop that habit? **It starts in the heart** that says, ‘I want to please God in every area of my life—and I want to bring my thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ!’

Will God help you if you have that kind of desire? Yes; He will!

2. Second, I believe God wants us to **pray more for those** that are in authority over us. I wonder what would happen if we **prayed for the leaders in government** as much as we complained about them?

3. Lastly, are you saved? Government can make **your physical life** on this earth difficult or pleasant, but it has no ability to influence your **eternal** destiny. You WILL die and spend eternity somewhere; where will that be?